

Septuagint: History, Relation to the New Testament, Its Acceptance, and Its Later Rejection Second Edition Herb Solinsky May 1, 2021

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[1] The Masoretic Text and its Comparison to Other Hebrew Texts

John 10:35 “the Scripture cannot be broken.” This is a reference to the Hebrew Bible.

The Hebrew Bible with parts of two of its books written in the Aramaic language will simply be called the Hebrew Bible. Shortly after the year 650 CE the Jewish approved trained copyists of the Hebrew Bible known as the Masoretes added vowel marks and marginal notes to the Hebrew Bible, and the result is known as the Masoretic Text (MT). For simplicity, when the MT has its vowel marks and marginal notes removed, the result will still be called the MT.

The various copies of parts of the Hebrew Bible that are found among the Dead Sea Scrolls do *not* represent the MT for the following reason. The Hebrew language spoken by some of the Jews in and near the first century had grammatical changes, especially to the endings of the verbs when this version of Hebrew is compared to the more ancient grammar of the MT (Abegg 1998). The approved trained copyists of the MT did not attempt to bring the exact spellings of the ancient Hebrew words into the contemporary usage of the first century. Keeping the ancient spellings exactly the same in the MT is a distinction of the faithfulness of the copying regardless of the modifications in speaking Hebrew in the first century (Van der Woude 1992; Kutscher 1982 p. 93),

This faithfulness in exact copying in the MT was made evident in the early 1960’s when Israeli archaeologists explored ancient Masada and the caves of the Judean desert. They excavated in these two areas and discovered parts of several books of the Hebrew Bible. Josephus reported that when the Jewish forces took over Masada from the Romans, they came from Jerusalem. Parts of their Hebrew Bibles were found from before the year 66. These texts were letter for letter the MT without any changes due to contemporary usage of Hebrew. The inspired text was kept exactly the same. The caves from the Judean desert show the MT as well.

On p, 41 of Tov 2012 he wrote, “The fact that we can pre-date [by about 1000 years before the Leningrad Codex of c. 1000 CE] the text of MT is very important, but not revolutionary as scholars have assumed for a long time that MT must have been in use in the last centuries B.C.E. and the first centuries C.E. since the biblical text quoted in rabbinic literature is identical to MT.”

On p, 42 of Tov 2012 he wrote, “All the texts that were found at sites in the Judean Desert other than Qumran display complete identity with the medieval tradition of MT.” The Dead Sea Scrolls have other changes to their Hebrew Bibles besides the contemporary grammar. These are not faithful copies. The marks of a faithful copy are

exactness to the original in the copy.

[2] The Septuagint and its Early History

Simply stated, the Septuagint is a translation of the Hebrew Bible into the Greek language. The translation process was carried out in two separate phases: first the Pentateuch c. 280-250 BCE, and later the remainder of the Hebrew Bible, which was completed before the year 100 BCE, although some scholars think it was not completed that early. Indirect evidence causes the majority of modern scholars to believe that the place in which the translation was made was Alexandria, Egypt. Some scholars think that a few books beyond the Pentateuch were likely translated into Greek from Palestine.

The Hebrew text from which the Septuagint was translated is called the Vorlage, which no longer exists, even in part. No one knows what the original text of the Septuagint was because copyists were not careful to copy the text without modification. The Septuagint is often called the LXX (the value of 70) despite the fact that today's scholars realize that this number has no actual significance for the true history of the Septuagint.

There are a variety of reasons that people today have an interest in the Septuagint, but the most important reasons are: (1) The New Testament theological vocabulary is often taken from the vocabulary of the Septuagint, so that the Septuagint is a bridge between the Hebrew words of the Hebrew Bible and the Greek words of the New Testament; (2) For the first several centuries of Christianity, the version of the Old Testament that was used by Christians was the Septuagint rather than the Hebrew Bible; and (3) The grammar of the New Testament is usually similar to the grammar of the Septuagint (called the Koine [= common] Greek of the eastern side of the Mediterranean Sea).

[3] The NETS Translation and the Critical Greek Text used

The first major translation of the Septuagint into English was made by Sir Lancelot C. L. Brenton, which was completed in 1844, although it was first published in 1851. This was based upon *one complete* Greek handwritten manuscript that were written c. 350, which was over 600 years after the Pentateuch of the Septuagint was originally translated. For several decades modern scholars who specialize in the Septuagint have recognized the need for a new translation that is based upon a Greek text that has a better foundation called the critical Greek text. A team of translators have completed this new literal translation called NETS in 2007.

There are about 600 handwritten copies of significant parts of the Septuagint. These copies have numerous differences, some of which are more significant than others. Copyists of the Septuagint were not trying to be exactly faithful in the copying process and they were not trained in this.

Only a little over a dozen fragments of the Septuagint date from before the birth of the prolific Christian writer named Origen (c. 184-253/254). Almost all of the handwritten copies date from c. 300 and later! Origen is considered very important for composing the critical Greek text of the Septuagint.

Origen was the director of a multi-year project called the Hexapla, that arranged the Old Testament into six columns, each of which had a version of the Old Testament. The fifth column was Origen's version of the Septuagint, which we no longer possess. Origen wrote letters to other Christian leaders concerning his efforts on the fifth column, which was the Septuagint (Fernandez Marcos 2000 and Martens 2012). All of Origen's quotations from his various commentaries on the books of the Old Testament were collected. These quotations were used for comparison with the various handwritten copies of the Septuagint. Those copies that are closest to Origen's quotations are given greater weight for the critical Greek text.

More than 20 volumes of Greek texts have been published that show the critical Greek text on the top one-fifth of the page, with the other 80 percent of the page devoted to alternate footnoted phrases from Greek readings from the other handwritten copies. This multi-volume work is known as the Gottingen Septuaginta-Unternehmen project (note Wevers 1986). The NETS translation is based upon this project.

Some scholars are not at all sure that Origen knew enough to determine the text of the Septuagint that was closest to the original because he does not have enough details and admits that he sometimes had to heal the fifth column through acceptance of Aquila's translation from Hebrew into Greek. Origen wrote that the copies of various books of the Septuagint could be grouped into three categories that are called recensions of the Septuagint, but he did not supply details of how these recensions originated or how it might be determined which was closest to the original.

[4] The Septuagint, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and Contradictions with the MT

The Hebrew text from which the Septuagint was translated is called the Vorlage, which no longer exists. It is certainly possible that certain statements in the Septuagint Pentateuch were never in the Vorlage because of deliberate biased distortions by the translators! This issue will be addressed next.

The NETS translation at Lev 24:16 states, "Whoever names the name of the Lord – by death let him be put to death; let the whole congregation of Israel stone him with stones. Whether a guest or a native. When he names the name let him die."

Notice that the above translation justifies the belief of Jews from before the time of the translation that it was a sin to pronounce the four letter name YHWH, despite that fact that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as well as the prophets of the Hebrew Bible spoke the name. A literal translation from the MT: Lev 24;16, "Moreover, he who blasphemes the

name of YHWH shall be put to death; all the congregation shall stone him. As the resident-alien as the native-born, when he blasphemes the Name, shall be put to death.”

In other words, the Septuagint substituted the act of pronouncing the name for the Hebrew word blaspheme. The Jewish tradition that forbade pronouncing the name was thus justified by the translation.

About 220 biblical scrolls were found among the eleven caves at Qumran, and the total number of scrolls is about 870. Each biblical scroll is all or part of a single biblical book. These scrolls from Qumran are all called the Dead Sea Scrolls. Some of the biblical scrolls are like the Masoretic Text except for the first century contemporary grammar in the scrolls that differs from the true MT, some are like the Samaritan Pentateuch, and some have mixed characteristics that are not easily categorized. P. 177 of VanderKam 2001 shows that there are fragments of five biblical scrolls written in Greek: Exodus,, two of Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. P. 364 of Joosten 2010 shows that there are three biblical scrolls written in Aramaic: Leviticus and two of Job. The remainder are all written in Hebrew.

The question of whether any of the Hebrew scrolls of the Hebrew Bible found among the Dead Sea Scrolls were significantly closer to the Septuagint than the MT has been studied and summarized by Emanuel Tov in several publications.

Tov 1995 and 1998 discusses the different types of biblical texts found among the Dead Sea Scrolls, including relationships to the assumed Vorlage (1995, pp. 96-97). Tov mentions that among the Dead Sea Scrolls there is one Hebrew text of Jeremiah, one Hebrew text of Deuteronomy, and one partial Hebrew text of Leviticus that show a strong affinity with the assumed Vorlage, using the Septuagint for this assumed Vorlage. Tov discusses this again in more detail in 2012 pp. 3-17. He wrote on p. 14, “The description of the character of the [Hebrew] texts [of the Bible from Qumran] that are close to the LXX in the various Scripture books shows that they share only a limited number of features; therefore, it would be inappropriate to speak of a Septuagintal text-type, Septuagintal features, or the like.” This paper discusses seven scrolls that have some aspects that show different degrees of affinity to the Septuagint, but only one scroll of Jeremiah and one of Samuel has significant affinity. These two scrolls are still not close enough to the Septuagint to have been used to make the Septuagint translation, according to Tov.

What the above shows is that although there are a wide variety of kinds of biblical texts found among the Dead Sea Scrolls so that those who gathered these Hebrew texts seem to have had no prejudice about what types of texts to collect, none of the scrolls shows a copy of the Vorlage that could be used as the source to reasonably accurately translate the Septuagint as we have it.

On p. 43 of Van der Woude 1995 we note, “Another problem was how to account for the

variants between the Septuagint and the Masoretic text. Some scholars attributed the differences simply to the license of the Greek translators. Others thought that the translators worked from an early version of the Hebrew text that differed from the Hebrew of the Masoretic text. Without knowing this was so, or whether the Greek text was simply a very free translation, it was difficult to use the Septuagint for text-historical or text-critical purposes.”

A problem arises when we find a significant difference between the Septuagint Pentateuch and the MT. Perhaps the two greatest differences between them are: (1) The number of years from the creation of Adam to the time of the flood; and (2) The determination of the date for the Feast of Weeks. These are briefly discussed next.

Egyptian chronology of the world is discussed on pp. 659-662 of Cryer 1995. Today this chronology is attributed to the Egyptian priest Manetho which would make Egyptian chronology several hundred years older than the creation of Adam according to the MT. This would be an embarrassment to Jews living in Egypt. Apparently, to avoid this embarrassment, the Septuagint adds 100 years to six birth years in Genesis. Therefore, simple arithmetic shows the Septuagint chronology has Methusaleh living beyond the flood, which the translators and most of the ancient world failed to notice.

In the Mishnah c. 200 CE (which quotes the Megillat Tanaat c. 90 CE) there is evidence that the Aaronic priesthood in the first century had a dispute with the Pharisees on the date of the Feast of Weeks. The MT favors the method of the priesthood (in Lev 23:11, 15-16 and Josh 5:10-12), while the Septuagint favors the method of the Pharisees and has alterations in Lev 23:11, 15-16 and Josh 5:10-12.

These examples give us reason to strongly suspect that the Vorlage did not agree fully with the Septuagint critical Greek text.

Jan Joosten 2011 wrote on p. 7. “The translators [of the Septuagint] tend to render Hebrew words – and sometimes Hebrew roots – by a single Greek equivalent. Since words in different languages rarely have the same exact meaning, this 'lexical stereotyping' leads to contextual uses that are unnatural in Greek. More often than not, the equivalent is adequate enough in some contexts, but does not fit certain other contexts. It also happens, however, that the Greek equivalent from the start diverged in meaning from the Hebrew.” Later on pp, 7-8 he wrote, “At times it appears that the translators confused different Hebrew words or forms.” In summary, inadequacies in scholarly knowledge concerning biblical Hebrew among the translators of the Septuagint should typically cause the modern reader to lack full confidence in blindly accepting the Septuagint's apparent equivalent of a rare Hebrew word as correct.

[5] Languages Spoken in Palestine in the First Century

The foundation for the discussion of the language of the Septuagint and the New

Testament requires a knowledge of the languages spoken in Judea and Galilee by Jews. This topic has been a heated scholarly debate for many years. Finally a book was published in 2015 authored by Michael Wise that should put this question to rest. On p. 331 Wise wrote, “Virtually all Judaeans spoke one dialect or another of Aramaic”. On p. 296 Wise presents circumstantial evidence that perhaps two-thirds of the Jews knew some Hebrew. On p.344 Wise indicates that there is insufficient data to arrive at a percentage of the population who spoke Greek. People who were employed by the Roman government had to know some Greek. Roman soldiers stationed in Judea spoke Greek (Rocca 2008 p. 247), so that salespeople who sold goods to Roman soldiers had to know some Greek. Coastal cities that harbored Greek trading vessels needed people who spoke some Greek. Trading roads that ran through Palestine needed people who spoke some Greek. There was a trade route that ran through southern Galilee (Porter 1994 p. 135). However, people who knew sufficient Greek to meet these needs did not need a large Greek vocabulary.

On p. 300 of Phang 2007 we find. “The modern impression is that Latin was the official and exclusive language of the Roman army is unrealistic as J. N. Adams’s work on bilingualism in the Roman Empire shows. In the Hellenized east, everyone above a minimum social level spoke Greek. Soldiers’ names are almost always Roman or Greek (Hellenized eastern names appear), and in the East, their private letters are usually in Greek. It is likely that personnel also spoke Greek (or possibly other native languages in ethnic units) in the Roman army in the East, except for some Latin words or phrases in formal bureaucratic, or ritual contexts.” On p. 608 of Adams 2003 we find, “In the Roman army in Egypt matters of an official kind were regularly handled in Greek, both in dealings with outsiders to the unit and in internal record keeping.”

The result of this analysis is that the Greek that was spoken by Jews in Palestine in and near the first century must have been saturated with idioms from the Aramaic and Hebrew languages.

An interesting generalized corroboration of this is derived from Acts 6:1 where the Greek word *Hellenistes* occurs (Strong’s number 1675, only in Acts 6:1; 9:29; 11:20). P. 26 of Muddiman 2002 states, “This linguistic sense is reflected in New Testament usage: at Acts 6:1 ‘Hellenists’ means Greek-speaking Jewish Christians living in Jerusalem; and in Acts 9:29 it refers to Greek-speaking Jewish opponents of Paul. The latter reference clearly indicates that no other supposed characteristic of ‘Hellenistic’ Judaism, for example, less strict observance of Torah or reservations about the Temple cult, is implied”. Therefore the designation of “Greek-speaking” implies that the other Jews were *not* Greek-speaking!

[6] The Need for a Greek Translation of the Hebrew Bible

There was a practical reason that the Septuagint translation was made. In the year 332

BCE Alexander the Great victoriously entered Egypt as its master. He declared that a city should be built named after him. That city was named Alexandria. It became the second most populous city in the Roman empire, estimated to have 500,000 people. About 200,000 of them were Jewish transplants, mostly from Judea. These transplanted Jews brought Aramaic and Hebrew idioms with them into Egypt where the language of the educated class was Greek, although the native Egyptians spoke the Coptic language.

On p. 50 of Thompson 1992 we note that it was not only in the capital city of Alexandria that Greek was promoted by the Greek rulers (the Ptolemaic dynasty): “In the villages of Egypt it was more than simply the basics of Greek education that were taught. Those who went through this system had an important role to play in the Ptolemaic system of government, and whatever their original background, the culture that they learned was the conquerors’ culture.” Later on that page we note that Greek teachers and their families were exempted from taxes.

On p. 3 of Maehler 2004 we note, “If this [ancient Egyptian] school-book is typical of the way in which Greek-speaking children were educated in Ptolemaic Egypt, we must conclude that their schools were fiercely Hellenocentric and quite deliberately ignored the Egyptian cultural traditions which surrounded them. These schools were exclusive; they evidently did not cater for Egyptian children, nor indeed for any other non-Greek children, since knowledge of the Greek language was taken for granted: they had no program for ‘Teaching Greek as a Foreign Language’”.

In ancient times, without the printing press and modern conveniences enabled by electricity to provide significant leisure time, perhaps 90 percent of the population did not know how to read the most common language in their environment (Wise 2015 pp. 349-350; Bakhos 2010).

On p. 566 of Young 2005 we note, “Following the work on Greco-Roman literacy by W. Harris I argued that none of the factors that led to modern mass literacy were present in ancient Israel. These include: the technology to produce vast numbers of inexpensive texts (i.e. the printing press); a network of schools, subsidized by religion or the state; economic complexity, comparable to the Industrial Revolution, in which semi-educated masses are considered indispensable to the state’s well being; and the widespread existence of an ideology that either for economic, religious or philanthropic reasons sees mass literacy as a worthwhile end. The absence of these factors means that we must start with an expectation of a low rate of literacy unless compelling grounds to think otherwise emerge.”

The Jews of Alexandria soon lost their knowledge of Hebrew and needed to have their Bible translated into the common language of their environment, which was Greek.

In Alexandria, about 40 percent of the population was Jewish, and these Jews brought Aramaic and Hebrew idioms with them into the Greek language of Alexandria. To be

sure, the most noteworthy scholars that emigrated to Alexandria (from Athens and other cities in the Greek peninsula) close to the famous library that also served as an advanced education center, used more educated Greek grammar without the Aramaic and Hebrew idioms, but these highly educated exceptions were not part of the general population of Alexandria.

One exception is the Jewish author Philo of Alexandria (c. 20 BCE – c. 50 CE) who was from a very wealthy family and was devoted to personal education and writing. On p. 1053 Mussies 1976 stated, “Philo wrote his immense oeuvre in excellent Greek and usually in a good style as well, his vocabulary having much in common with Plato”.

[7] The Jews in Asia Minor spoke Greek, not Aramaic and not Hebrew

P. 234 of Watt 2013 states, “Rather than monolithic, the Roman empire became bilingual. In the east, Greek remained the common language of the educated and Latin, understandably, served an administrative function. Toward the west, Greek entered as the language of mostly lower class immigrants but also gained status amongst educated society which acquainted itself with the glories of Hellenic centuries past and present.”

The churches that were established by Paul were in Asia Minor where there were many synagogues. What languages were spoken by the Jews in that region? In both the Babylonian empire and the Persian empire the official language was Aramaic. The Jews in the Persian empire were loyal and productive, so the government promoted their establishing synagogues in Asia Minor where they brought the Aramaic language with them from Persia. When Alexander the Great defeated the Persian empire, he wanted to spread Greek culture and the Greek language, and this era brought forth the Hellenistic age. Greek began to replace Aramaic in Asia Minor.

Excavations of writings from Asia Minor where the apostle Paul preached the gospel show that the only Aramaic writings that were dug up provide distinctive features of Aramaic that identify the time of the Persian dominance of the region prior to Alexander the Great (Folmer 1995 p. 796). P. 61 of Horrocks 1997, states, “It [Greek] was not the native language of the Hellenistic world as a whole, and only in Asia Minor did Greek eventually, after many centuries, come anywhere close to eliminating the indigenous languages as a universal medium of communication (cf. 8.2).”

On p. 232 of Amerling it states, “Perhaps not at all, but the most important indicators of Jewish cultural resilience can be found in Syria – even more marked than in Asia Minor; Jerusalem and the necropolis of Beth She’arim are not as important for Jews of Asia Minor; **there is almost no bilingualism and certainly no retention of Aramaic in Asia Minor**; the leadership of the high priests or the rabbis is - even in late antiquity - far less marked than in Syria, and there is no tangible evidence that the two revolts [66-70, 132-135] had any influence on the situation of the diaspora in Asia Minor.”

We must conclude that in order for the gospel to be successful in Asia Minor, it must be brought to the synagogues of Asia Minor in the Greek language. Some form of the Septuagint would have been popular among Jews in Asia Minor in the first century. The Hebrew Bible could not be used there because they lacked a knowledge of Hebrew. Excavations of some ancient synagogues in that region show the use of Greek, not Hebrew (Kraabel 1971).

In Boyd-Taylor 2021 p. 22 we find, “Although originally a Palestinian phenomenon, primitive Christianity used the Greek version of the Jewish Scriptures from very early on. With the rapid spread of a missionary church at once predominantly Gentile and almost entirely Greek-speaking, the ascendancy of the Greek Bible was inevitable.”

In Muller 2021 p. 116 we find, “If holy books of Judaism had not existed in a Greek version, they would soon have been inaccessible for most early Christians.”

[8] The Nature of the Greek Language in the Septuagint and the New Testament

Many papyrus as well as broken pottery remains from ancient Egypt with Greek writing on them prove beyond a doubt that the general population of ancient Alexandria had adopted the Aramaic and Hebrew idioms of the Jews into their common spoken version of Greek. Not only were these idioms adopted into Greek usage, but even some of the features of the Aramaic syntax were thrust into the Greek language.

On p. 219 of Pietersma 2001 we note, “As Conybeare and Stock (and others) noted nearly a century ago, Septuagintal Greek is often ‘hardly Greek at all, but rather Hebrew in disguise,’ especially in its syntax.”

There were many Jews from Alexandria that participated in producing the Septuagint translation, with some translating literally, while others translating freely. Certain Hebrew words were translated into different Greek words. Thus the method of translation of the translators was not uniform and the vocabulary was not uniform. For specific theological terms there was greater consistency in the Septuagint.

The Greek plays and other literary classics from Athens were written in a polished Greek form called Attic Greek or classical Greek. P. 22 of Joosten 2013 states, “Indeed many words and expressions attested in the Greek Bible are simply absent from the classical corpus, while other words are used with a new meaning.”

Adolf Deissmann (c. 1900) participated in archaeological excavations in the Mediterranean east and examined Greek writings from the era of the first century. On p. 23 of Joosten 2013 we find the following: “Deissmann was able to show that the linguistic basis – the morphology, basic vocabulary and syntax – of Septuagint and New Testament Greek is the common, non-literary language of the Hellenistic period as it was practised throughout the Greek speaking world at the time the writings were created.”

When discussing the Septuagint, it must be kept in mind that there were eventually writings that became part of the Septuagint that were never part of the Hebrew Bible. This included the Apocrypha and even the New Testament because the copyists were eventually Christians rather than Jews.

On p. 418 of Gignac 2013 it states, “The nature of the language of the New Testament has been discussed, debated, and variously explained from the early Christian centuries to the present day. It is obviously Greek, but it differs markedly from Classical Greek on the one hand and from contemporary Koine [= common] Greek on the other, not only in the use of many words unknown to Classical and Hellenistic authors, but especially in the use of many non-Greek forms and syntactical constructions.”

Contemporary Greek far from Palestine and Egypt did not have the Aramaic and Hebrew idioms, so this accounts for one major difference.

Turner 1976 discusses the Greek writing style of each of the writers of the New Testament. Each author is different in writing style.

On p. 341 of Pitts 2013 the following is said about the last book of the New Testament, “Revelation is the only book that is written in something close to vulgar Greek (although it is certainly not as vulgar as much of the papyri).”

On p. 24 of Joosten we note: “Alongside the writings reflecting a relatively low stylistic register of the [Greek] language one finds a few books with a rather nice literary style, such as the Wisdom of Solomon or the second part of the Acts of the Apostles.”

On p. 29 Joosten discusses some distinctive words in the Septuagint that were borrowed from contemporary Jewish use. He wrote, “As is shown by the final alpha, reflecting the emphatic state, these words were borrowed from Aramaic.” In other words those who translated the Septuagint were indicating that the common Jewish use was taken from Aramaic rather than Hebrew.

On p. 33 Joosten wrote, “Psalms, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the Twelve [Minor Prophets], as well as most of the historical books, were translated word for word.”

On p. 37 Joosten wrote, “Without putting too fine a point on it, New Testament Greek is Hellenistic Greek tainted by Semitic influences.”

On p. 40 Joosten wrote that the grammar of Mark’s Gospel is sometimes rather rough and ready. He wrote that it is not faulty as much as it is substandard.

On p. 41 Joosten wrote that the Greek of Matthew is of higher quality than that of Mark.

On p. 42 in discussion about Luke’s writings, Joosten wrote, “Moreover, in the prologue to his Gospel and in the second part of Acts, Luke shows that he is perfectly capable of writing polished koine [= common] Greek.”

Joosten wrote that Luke abandons his polished Greek style when he borrows from the

Septuagint.

On p. 43 Joosten wrote, “The language of Paul is that of a tentmaker, not that of a writer or philosopher. He uses many words avoided in contemporary literature. His rhetoric, too, is more spontaneous than learned. There is no reason to doubt, however, that Paul is writing in his mother tongue. His Greek is fluent and idiomatic.”

On the same page he wrote of Paul’s writings, “His influence of the Septuagint can be felt in many passages.

On p. 43 Joosten wrote that Hebrews is written in a fine Hellenistic Greek of high quality. Only when the writer of Hebrews quotes from the Old Testament does he show Hebraisms.

On p. 43 Joosten wrote that II Peter is the only writing of the New Testament that witnesses to the Attic Greek.

[9] Acceptance of the Septuagint by Christians, and its Abandonment by Jews

On p.4 of Rajak 2001 it states (undoubtedly relating to the first century and perhaps beyond), “The Jews of Palestine, arguably themselves somewhat less exposed, were well aware that around the Roman empire lived Jews who knew no Hebrew, spoke no Aramaic, lived their lives, heard their Bible in a special form of Greek – the language of their Septuagint, did their reading (if they did it) in high Greek.”

The roughly 600 handwritten copies of the Septuagint were from a time that the Jews had, in many quarters, abandoned the Septuagint and the Christians had performed its copying rather than Jews (Tov 1988 p. 163). The Jews had three newer translations of the Hebrew Bible into Greek: those of Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion. These are called the Three; they have not survived except in fragments.

The Hebrew rabbinic document published c. 200-225 called the Mishnah could have been written in Greek, but its author’s devotion to the Hebrew language began the promotion of Hebrew among rabbis being trained in Caesarea who traveled there from different parts of the Mediterranean region and beyond to earn approved rabbinic credentials. The Mishnah claimed to explain the law of Moses in greater detail than the Hebrew Bible itself. The basic attitude of Jews toward translations of the Hebrew Bible into Greek declined even though Jews from the Mediterranean regions were powerless to avoid Greek translations. Especially from the third century onward the Jews generally could not regard any translations as truly inspired. Rabbinic literature expanded in the same century to include the Tosefta, and in later centuries to include other documents, especially the Palestinian Talmud and the Babylonian Talmud. All of these were written in Hebrew for trained rabbis. This began the slow but steady promotion of the Hebrew language among Jews (De Lange 1996).

Christians accepted the Septuagint translation and rarely bothered with the Three that

were written by Jews or Jewish converts. One important exception is Origen who used the Three in his Hexapla along with the Septuagint. Origen sometimes used the Three to “heal” the Septuagint when he could not determine the correct text of the Septuagint. Christian writers visited Origen’s library to copy his version of all or parts of the Septuagint because they had more confidence in Origen’s efforts than whatever text they possessed. Christians treated the Septuagint as if it was fully inspired for the Old Testament despite knowing there were variations. Christians generally ignored the Jewish attitude toward the Septuagint.

[10] Quotations from the Old Testament in the New Testament

On p. 155 of Karrier and Schmid 2010 we note the following: “None of the Septuagint manuscripts used by the New Testament authors is preserved”.

Not possessing the Septuagint as it was in the first century makes it difficult to determine the source of a quotation from the Old Testament that is found in the New Testament; that is, whether it came from the Hebrew Bible, some version of the Septuagint, or an approximation based upon the writer’s memory. Estimates are that roughly 75 percent of these quotations are *closer* to some version of the Septuagint than the Hebrew Bible. However, some modern scholars (Kaiser 1985 pp. 4-7) are quick to note that these quotations, even when not exactly in agreement with every detail from the Hebrew Bible, do not do violence for the writer’s purpose in making the quotation.

The writers of the New Testament did not feel a need to be exactly precise when quoting from the Old Testament. They knew that their audience had some version of the Septuagint and they had to accept this reality. The fact that many quotations resemble surviving copies of the Septuagint does not give validity to the Septuagint.

[11] Jerome and the Rejection of the Septuagint

Jerome’s wealthy father recognized his son’s language abilities at a young age and sent him to Rome to receive an advanced education. He excelled in language studies and wrote a few books in Latin that sold widely and gave Jerome a source of income. Jerome was a Christian and the bishop of Rome (Damasus) appreciated Jerome’s writing skills. Bishop Damasus asked Jerome to make a new translation of the Scriptures into Latin for the benefit of the Christians in Rome. Jerome began with a copy of the Septuagint Psalms that he found in Rome. Soon he traveled to Caesarea and examined the Psalms in Origen’s Hexapla. He accepted the superiority of Origen’s Septuagint Psalms and then made his second translation of the Psalms into Latin. Jerome began to study Origen’s letters and comments of the versions of the Septuagint, and this began his disillusionment in the Septuagint. He could see that although Origen could not bring himself to directly criticize the Septuagint that his fellow Christian leaders considered to be inspired, in reality, Origen’s remarks made it clear to Jerome that there was no way to know what version of the Septuagint was close to the original.

Jerome began to study Hebrew and he examined the Hebrew Bible in some cities and especially the Hexapla from Caesarea. He was impressed that he could find no differences in the various texts of the Hebrew Bible, unlike the Septuagint. After several years of studying Hebrew, he knew he needed to fulfill the request of Bishop Damasus by making a translation from Hebrew into Latin instead of from some Greek text into Latin. Jerome decided to introduce the beginning of his translation with a new book that criticized the Septuagint in the year 391 or 392 (see Hayward 1995 p. 10 and 26). He called his book *Hebrew Questions on Genesis*. (abbreviated QHG). QHG highlighted the superiority of the Hebrew Bible compared to the Septuagint by examples from the Three (Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion) using Origen's Hexapla. On p. 14 Hayward wrote of QHG, "His purpose [in writing QHG] seems to be nothing less than an attempt to justify his dealings with Judaism and the Jews, when the ecclesiastical and civil authorities were intent on pushing that nation to the margins of Christian society." Of course it was Jews who taught Jerome Hebrew and he needed to deal with them peaceably. The Three translations were also allied with Judaism, and Christians mistrusted this alignment.

Jerome distributed QHG to several Church leaders in the Roman empire. He especially noted the faulty chronology that led to the year of the flood associated with Noah, which led to the strange discovery that the Septuagint forced Methusaleh to continue living beyond the flood. They could not refute his reasoning, but it took years for his logic to cause them to eventually give up the view that the Septuagint is an inspired work. Abandoning the Septuagint was easier where Latin was spoken in the western side of the Mediterranean Sea, but where Greek was spoken in the east, it was difficult to abandon. Christians did not trust translations by Jews such as those of Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotian. In much of the east where Greek was spoken and there was no translation to replace it among Greek-speaking people it remained the primary translation for Christians until scholarship advanced during the late Renaissance.

Jerome was a scholar and pioneer who mastered Latin, Greek, and Hebrew and was primarily responsible for the eventual abandonment of the Septuagint by Church leaders. His Latin translation of the MT is a phrase by phrase translation rather than a literal translation, yet it does show a faithfulness to the MT and is a witness to the MT from the time of his translation from 391 to 405.

[12] Septuagint and the Month of Abib

It is instructive to use an interesting example from Scripture to illustrate limitations of the Septuagint translators for understanding seldom used Hebrew words. Discussion will center on the meaning of Abib (more accurately the Hebrew word *aviv*). The translation in NETS is more accurate and literal than in Brenton and whenever there is no difference that underlies the Greek in these translations, NETS will be used.

Concerning all six places in which the Hebrew expression *chodesh ha aviv* (month of the *aviv*) occurs in the MT (Ex 13:4; 23:15; 34:18, 18; Deut 16:1, 1), only one expression is used in the Septuagint, the Greek *meni ton neon*, which means “month of the new”. The grammatical form of *ton neon* is plural, so that it implies a plural noun. This consistency in all places lends weight to the belief that the translators wanted to use the same meaning in all places. However, it indicates that they were not sure of its meaning because there is no plural noun. It seems safe to accept the belief that the translators knew it referred to new plant growth with plural connotations. The word “new” can imply freshness or recent growth, and does not commit to what vegetation was involved. In all six places the very literal careful NETS translation of “month of the *aviv*” has “month of the new things”, thus highlighting the noticeable lack of clarity for the word *aviv*. These six places are seen in the Greek on page 922 of Hatch and Redpath under the word for month, or they may be looked up individually in Brenton, which has the Greek.

In Ex 9:31 where *aviv* occurs, a literal translation from the Hebrew is “barley [was in the] ear”. The NETS translation has, “Now the flax and the barley were ruined. For the barley was ripe, and the flax was going to seed.”

Can the word *aviv* mean ripe as NETS accurately states from the Greek?

Here the Septuagint has the Greek word *parestekuia* where *aviv* occurs, and this Greek word is discussed on pp. 56-57 of Lee 1983. Lee provides a few ancient examples of its use in an agricultural context. On p. 56 Lee provides the approximate choice of meanings “‘be ripe’, ‘be fully grown’”. The NETS translation chooses ripe.

The true meaning of *aviv* can be determined from a study of the context of the hail plague focused on Ex 9:31, which is discussed in Smith 1883 from before the Aswan Dam was built, after which the natural overflow of the Nile River became distorted. Smith received responses from agricultural stations along the Nile River to know the differences in the time of ear formation of barley depending on the latitude within the 500 mile length of the Nile River. He learned that in the far south of Egypt where it was warmest, the barley came to an ear five weeks earlier than in the north, with gradual change between these extremes.

If, at the time of the hail plague, the barley had been ripe in the far north, then it would have been five weeks further ripe in the far south and would therefore have been harvested in the far south. If harvested, it would **not** have been ruined. But a careful reading of the hail plague shows that the barley was ruined throughout all of Egypt.

Ex 9:31 shows that the Hebrew word *aviv* applies to all the barley from north to south as the reason why it was ruined. Once the ear is destroyed it will not grow back again on the same plant. The variation in timing shows that *aviv* means that the grain has formed an ear. There is no reference to ripeness, and the context shows that it was in various stages of growth before it was ripe enough to harvest.

“Month of *aviv*” means “month of ears”. The word *aviv* may include the time of ripeness because when barley is ripe, it also has an ear.

A literal translation of the MT of Lev 2:14 is, “And if you-offer a cereal-offering of firstfruits to YHWH, you-shall-offer ears [= *aviv*] parched/roasted-grain with fire, [that is] fresh-grain [= *karmel*] crushed [for a] cereal-offering of your-firstfruits;”

In Lev 2:14 where *aviv* occurs, the Septuagint has *nea*, which means “new” or “fresh”. This is not precise. The NETS translation contains the following group of words in Lev 2:14, “new, roasted, pounded, wheaten-groats”. This must include both Hebrew words *aviv* and *karmel*. The translation for *karmel* seems to be omitted. The translator of Leviticus did not know the meaning of either word.

By comparing the Septuagint critical Greek text in Wevers 1986 with the Hebrew text for Lev 2:14 and 23:14, it is clear that in the former verse *karmel* is either not translated, or is instead translated into the Greek word *kidra* and in the latter verse, *karmel* is translated *kidra nea*. On page 1991 column 2 of Liddell and Scott 1996 *kidra* is defined as “unripe wheaten-groats, rubbed from the ear in the hands”. Note the apparent description in Luke 6:1. The word *nea* means “new” or “fresh”. For Lev 23:14 either *kidra* or *nea* may have been sufficient to translate *karmel*, but having both of them may indicate that both words capture the meaning of *karmel* as understood by the translator. In Lev 2:14 NETS seems to translate *kidra* into “wheaten-groats” and Brenton translates *kidra* into “grains”. Both NETS and Brenton are not convinced to follow the full meaning of *kidra* in Liddell and Scott. In Lev 23:14 NETS translates *kidra nea* into “fresh kernels” where *nea* corresponds to “fresh”. In Lev 23:14 Brenton translates *kidra nea* into “new corn”. The conclusion is that the Septuagint gives mixed results because only Lev 23:14 includes “new” or “fresh” as part of the meaning for *karmel*, and there is uncertainty on whether to translate *kidra* as in Liddell and Scott or as in both NETS and Brenton.

This indicates that the educated Jews in Alexandria do not seem to be aware of any important significance for the Hebrew word *aviv*, although some of them undoubtedly went to Jerusalem during the seven days of unleavened bread, witnessed the wave sheaf offering, and understood how the first month was determined.

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